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SIPDIS

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WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
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SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
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JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Iran: Nuclear Program
3. Israel-U.S. Relations

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that on Monday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice cautioned Palestinian voters ahead of Wednesday's elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) that terrorism is not a pathway to peace. Leading media published the results of polls in the PA that predict a 10-percent gap in Fatah's favor. Ha'aretz quoted U.S. Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones as saying Monday that the USG would have preferred to see Hamas only in the PLC and not in the PA's government. He reportedly made a comparison between the situation in the P.A. and in Lebanon: "We talk to the Lebanese government, but not to ministers from the Hizbullah and a similar mechanism can be formed in the Palestinian Authority." Jones spoke at a reception held by Meretz Chairman, Yossi Beilin, in honor of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who is heading a team of observers, who arrived to supervise the Palestinian elections. The Ambassador was quoted as saying that Hamas would be judged by its actions after the elections.

The Jerusalem Post quoted diplomatic officials as saying Monday that the U.S. will not deal with Hamas ministers in a future PA government, but also that it will not cut off ties with the PA as a result of Hamas's inclusion. The newspaper quoted the officials as saying that the U.S. formula for dealing with a PA government following the elections would be based on the "Lebanese model." Sheikh Muhammad Abu Tier, Hamas's No.2 candidate in the PLC elections in Jerusalem, was quoted as saying in an interview with Israel Radio that civilians should be kept away from violence on both sides. During the interview, Abu Tier conveyed a conciliatory message to the Jews. The radio noted that he refrained from saying whether he favored peace with Israel. Other Israeli media also interviewed Abu Tier. Maariv reported that on Monday, two senior Hamas leaders -- Mahmoud Zahar and Khaled Mashal -- hinted that they are not ruling out negotiations with Israel under certain circumstances.

Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that the government will not allow jailed Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti to serve as a minister in the PA following the PLC elections.

Maariv quoted political commentators, politicians, and Jewish leaders in the U.S. as saying the White House has recently decided to support Olmert as Washington's favorite candidate for the Israeli premiership. Maariv cited the belief of American political commentators that the "adoption" of Olmert by the White House will

not be public and open. Both Yediot and Maariv led with predictions about what Acting PM Ehud Olmert will say at his speech to the Herzliya Conference today. Yediot wrote that Olmert is expected to state that another disengagement would be a mistake, but that Israel would have to concede further land in order to maintain a Jewish majority. Maariv said that Olmert will say that he does not fear Hamas and that Israel is too strong to be afraid of the PA elections. Maariv wrote that Olmert will refrain from vowing there would not be another disengagement.

Leading media reported that in his speech at the Herzliya Conference on Monday, Labor Party Chairman Amir Peretz called for political negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians with the goal of reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians by 2010, in contrast to his statement immediately after his election to head the Labor Party, when he said he believed an agreement could be reached in a year. Media quoted Peretz as saying that if a diplomatic freeze results from a Hamas victory in the upcoming PLC elections, he would take unilateral steps to separate from the Palestinians in the West Bank. Peretz was quoted as saying that he believed that in Jerusalem, Israel should retain only its Jewish neighborhoods.

The Jerusalem Post quoted U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador John Bolton as saying on Monday that President Bush will not accept a nuclear Iran. Bolton was speaking from New York via video hook-up to the Herzliya Conference. Major media quoted FM Tzipi Livni as saying Monday at the Herzliya Conference that the question of Palestinian refugees and the right of return is the most central problem threatening Israel as a nation state. Several media quoted her as saying that the establishment of a Palestinian nation state is the solution to the refugee problem. Leading media quoted former IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon as saying Monday at the conference that the disengagement has turned the Gaza Strip into an "Al-Qaidastan."

The Jerusalem Post reported that former national security adviser Uzi Dayan, who heads the new Tafnit party, presented the newspaper with a diplomatic plan in which settlement blocs, the Jordan Valley, and Jerusalem would remain in Israel's hands. The Jerusalem Post quoted Dayan as saying: "What I want is for the U.S. to understand that this is the best we can do given the alternatives we have now."

Israel Radio reported that last night, IDF troops arrested Islamic Jihad activists, including Mahmoud Abu Rob, a key militant, in Qabatiyeh near Jenin. The radio also reported that in Ramallah, IDF troops arrested Abdullah Arar, a Hamas activist who was allegedly involved in the murder of the Israeli taxi driver Sasson Nuriel in September 2005.

Citing the German press agency DPA, Ha'aretz quoted a German government spokesman, Thomas Steg, as saying on Monday that German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who will visit Israel and the PA on Sunday and Monday, plans to make Iran's nuclear program a major issue for her talks in the region. Ha'aretz cited a report that appeared Monday on Farda News, a conservative Iranian web site considered to be closely aligned with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, according to which an agent working for the Mossad was arrested while crossing the border between Iran and Turkey.

Hatzofe reported that on Sunday, a close associate of Libyan ruler Muammar Qadhafi told Dr. Farouk Mouassi, an Arab Israeli, that Libya intends to declare normalization of relations with Israel, and even said that the announcement would be made this week. The newspaper quoted Israeli Foreign Ministry official Lior Ben David, who is in charge of communications with Arab countries, as saying: "When Libya wants to signal to Israel that it intends to establish relations with us, it will know how to let us know that they are ready. At present their solution is the establishment of a state called Isratine, meaning Israel and Palestine together."

Yediot reported that this week, 36 Palestinian medical staff --16 doctors and 20 nurses -- attended a three-day course in trauma medicine at the Sheba Medical Center in Tel Hashomer in central Israel. The organization Physicians For Human Rights was among the program's initiators.

Israel Radio reported that Israeli filmmaker Yoav Shamir's documentary "5 Days," which chronicles IDF operations during the evacuation of 8,000 Jewish

settlers from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, is enjoying tremendous success at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. The radio notes that while Shamir's 2003 documentary, "Checkpoint," which depicted the roadblocks that the IDF mans in the territories, was criticized by the Right, "5 Days" seems to arouse the audience's sympathy for IDF troops.

Ha'aretz reported that after PM Sharon's first stroke, his doctors concealed his condition from the public. The newspaper wrote that Sharon was suffering from cardiac and cerebral diseases -- beyond what was disclosed at the time.

Yediot reported that for the first time since the establishment of Israel, the Knesset has readied a draft constitution for the country, which leaves aside the resolution of sensitive issues such as "religion and state."

Ha'aretz bannered a rise of the number of Israelis living in poverty (one quarter of the population), according to a report released on Monday by the National Insurance Institute -- the Israeli equivalent of the Social Security Administration -- on Monday. The issue is covered by all media.

Yediot featured a lengthy article on lobbyist Jack Abramoff's possible acquaintance and deals with President Bush.

Ha'aretz published the results of a Dahaf Institute poll, which was commissioned by the Jewish Agency and which will be presented today at the Herzliya Conference: more than three-quarters (77 percent) of the Israeli public are pessimistic about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nearly half the respondents -- 48 percent -- said they think there will be no change in the next 20 years, with only one in five Israelis saying they expect Israel and the Palestinians to reach a peace agreement by 2025. Some 29 percent of the respondents said the conflict would worsen, while 22 percent expect it to be resolved. Ha'aretz wrote that the poll will be discussed at a session led by Jewish Agency Chairman Zeev Bielski, with the participation of former U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross and renowned lawyer Alan Dershowitz.

[1](#). Mideast:

Summary:

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The analyses as to who wants to hold negotiations with us but cannot and whether those who can do so ever will, leave the Israeli public totally apathetic."

Senior op-ed writer Akiya Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "Kadima and Hamas are virulent mutations of unilateral insanity."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The political positions of Fatah and Hamas seem to have converged along with their joint participation in terror attacks."

Block Quotes:

[1](#)I. "Elections Behind the Wall"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 24): "The [Israeli] politicians are clutching at Hamas's participation in the elections [for the Palestinian Legislative Council] as a drowning man clutches at a straw.... All this political fury is passing right over the heads of the public. Israelis have long since realized what the more sober politicians also know, namely that the die is cast. The decision on the future borders of the State of Israel is already upon us, and it is accepted by a very large percentage of Israelis, and that is that there will be a Palestinian state, and its capital will be Jerusalem, in one guise or another. The borders will be very close to those of 1967 if not identical, and in spite of all our high-flown rhetoric and sundry delusions of disengagement, it is not we who will choose the time and place at which this inevitable process will become a reality.... Most Israelis have no empathy for the Palestinians. For them, the difference

between Fatah and Hamas is about as convincing as the ritual declaration by Israeli leaders that [the Palestinian Authority] must 'accept responsibility' after terrorist attacks. The analyses as to who wants to hold negotiations with us but cannot and whether those who can do so ever will, leave the Israeli public totally apathetic. Like the majority of Palestinians, as reflected in the polls, the Israeli political center knows that the election will not make much difference to the condition of those living in the territories."

II. "Kadima and Hamas -- Virulent Mutations of Unilateral Insanity"

Senior op-ed writer Akiya Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (January 24): "A guest from afar, now visiting Israel and the occupied territories, might conclude that a deadly virus afflicts the political opinion of both peoples. One side throngs to join an instant party, directed by a substitute for a leader on sick leave. The other puts its trust in a religious party that entices small children to achieve celestial union with 70 virgins. With a bit of effort, such a visitor might unearth the source of the affliction. This is neither a heavenly decree nor a *deus ex machina*. This is 'chaos ex machina' by the hand of man. Kadima and Hamas are virulent mutations of unilateral insanity. Kadima is constructed on the ruins of the Israeli public's belief in the prospect of solving the conflict -- and on the growing belief in the option of managing it according to the public will: not negotiation but more unilateral withdrawals, more separation fence, more assassinations and more curfews. Hamas has risen atop the same ruins among the Palestinian public, and the belief in the option of managing it according to that public's will: not negotiation but more acts of terror, more Qassam missiles, more control of local authorities and more seats on the Legislative Council."

III. "The Alternative to Wishful Thinking"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (January 24): "The U.S. reportedly pressured Israel to allow [Marwan] Barghouti to be interviewed, but it is not clear that much pressure was necessary, given that the jailed Fatah leader seems to have become the latest Israeli candidate -- after Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas -- for the position of the Palestinian leader with whom we can 'do business'.... Barghouti's main message was to endorse Hamas's participation in the elections and call for a unity government. Indeed, the political positions of Fatah and Hamas seem to have converged along with their joint participation in terror attacks. Fatah emphasizes its support for negotiations, Hamas its support for 'resistance,' but both parties support both tactics.... The refusal of supposed moderates, like Barghouti, to abandon either the 'right to resist' or the 'right to return' demonstrates that they have not given up the quest to destroy Israel. The refusal of Israeli and American policy makers to recognize this and say so, far from advancing the cause of peace, contributes directly toward the perpetuation of the conflict."

12. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "It would appear that the Israelis and Americans would reluctantly accept a nuclear Iran, should a secular regime take power in Tehran, one that supports the West and abjures terrorism."

Block Quotes:

"The Real Conflict With Iran"

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 24): "The most difficult dimension for Israel in the matter [of the global implications of the Iranian crisis] is not the Iranian nuclear program, but rather the Israeli one -- the claim that Washington is biased in this matter, and that after it pressured Israel in the 1960s to limit its nuclear program, it discontinued this pressure and has accepted the circumspect situation in Dimona. While there are counterarguments (Israel did not deceive the authorities, because it is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; it

has not called for the destruction of Iran or any other country), they will not suffice should the political prevention plans fail and if Bush is faced with a cruel choice -- to wage an expensive war on Iran or to do away with the affirmative action toward Israel's nuclear situation, at the cost of stopping Iran from arming itself with nuclear weapons. In order to escape having to pay this price, it would appear that the Israelis and Americans would reluctantly accept a nuclear Iran, should a secular regime take power in Tehran, one that supports the West and abjures terrorism."

13. Israel-U.S. Relations:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "How long will it be before the Christian leaders who are put on trial point the finger at 'the Jew' who betrayed them?"

Block Quotes:

"Sin and Absolution in Washington"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 24): "In the Jewish communities [in the United States], some people are waiting for signs of anti-Semitism. [Lobbyist Jack] Abramoff is Jewish, as his name suggests. He is observant, and he also helped to fund a private Jewish school in the U.S., as well as a target range in the West Bank -- a man of the book and the sword, indeed. Concerning his links with lawmakers and with the Christian Right, he also provided funding for an organization that promotes dialogue between Jews and Evangelists. On the one hand, they were cooperating in support of Israel. On the other hand, the permanent suspicion that the friendship would not withstand rocky times still exists. How long will it be before the Christian leaders who are put on trial point the finger at 'the Jew' who betrayed them?"

JONES